



APPROVED 06/17/2021

**Georgia Connections Academy (GACA)**

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. ET

**Held at the following location:**

Georgia Connections Academy  
2763 Meadow Church Road, Suite 208  
Duluth, GA 30097

**1(800) 747-5150; Code 160-9140#**

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**I. Call to Order**

Mr. Julal called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. when all participants were present. He noted that all participants were in person at the meeting location, following all necessary social distancing and additional public health and safety protocols due to COVID-19. Ms. Bilal-Page also welcomed all those present, and reviewed high level objectives for the day.

**II. Roll Call**

Board Members Present at Roll Call: Steve Julal, Susan Collins, Darrell Grant, Rasheed Mustakeem and Susanne Watts (all in person at the meeting location, following public health and safety protocols for COVID-19 as required by state and federal guidelines);

Board Members Joined During Meeting: Rich Thompson (in person);

Guests Present: Brazilia Bilal-Page, School Leader; Caroline Fernandez, Marla Bowie and Yolanda Dounebaine, School Staff; Karen Duquette, Heather Woodward and Megann Arthur, Pearson Virtual Schools staff (in person); Gary Corkran, Pearson Virtual Schools (via phone for regular board meeting).

**III. Mission Statement**

School leadership team members showed a video created by 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students reviewing the school's Mission, Vision and Values to open the day.

Ms. Bilal-Page provided the Board with a presentation detailing the school's history from its opening in 2011 to today, highlighting the contributions of founding and governing board members, school staff and numerous other stakeholders. She also discussed current school administration, enrollment, and celebrations at GACA.

**IV. Board Strategic Development**

Ms. Bowie took the group through ice breaker activities on Nearpod, as well as productive meeting best practice exercises.

[Mr. Thompson joined the meeting at 9:50 a.m.]

a. Current Strategic Plan Overview

Ms. Fernandez reviewed the current Strategic Plan, including goals from 2018 through the current school year. She reviewed action steps for key initiatives, as well as progress and/or completion of established goals to date. Ms. Fernandez reviewed key metrics and data points of school performance for the past three school years, highlighting graduation rates and other measurable successes.

Dr. Dounebaine reviewed the SCSC charter renewal requirements, detailing specific academic, financial and operational standards within the mandated performance framework that must be met to obtain charter renewal. She reviewed the metrics for GACA as compared with other schools authorized by the SCSC, and all participants discussed the waiver for CCRPI scores for the two school years affected by very low test participation due largely to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants reviewed the sub-categories for each standard, and those met by school year.

b. Charter Renewal Preparation / Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF)

All participants discussed preparation by the school for the charter renewal process, including Board members' participation in the process and current knowledge level of all performance metrics for the school within the Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF). Dr. Dounebaine reviewed the changes in the CPF scoring matrix since the last charter renewal process. Ms. Bilal-Page discussed timeline aspects known for the upcoming charter renewal process.

Ms. Bilal-Page and Ms. Fernandez presented to the Board on the many changes to school operations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. They reviewed the dramatic enrollment increase that resulted, as well. All participants discussed the landscape of virtual education both in GA and nationwide, as well as the social and emotional components of virtual learning during the pandemic.

Ms. Fernandez provided attendees with an overview of specific products, programs and initiatives that have proven most successful for students at GACA. She provided details of the GACA STEAM Academy, including the first ever STEAM summer camps, beginning in summer 2021.

Ms. Bilal-Page discussed the 'data through an equity lens' approach to analyzing the school's data; she reviewed the analysis and efforts of staff to close the opportunity and performance gaps in the school's population. Attendees had discussion of the positive effect on personalized learning at the school that has resulted from the Cares Act funding.

c. Work Session on Strategic Plan Initiatives and Updates

Ms. Bilal-Page reviewed the academic goals of the Strategic Plan, and how they incorporate into a successful CPF score and thus, charter renewal. Board members discussed student growth percentile requirements, as well as challenges for the school for those students who started at a very high performance level. Board members had an extensive brainstorming session regarding priorities and strategies for academic, financial and operational success in the CPF.

d. Goal Setting for the 2021-2022 School Year

Board members had discussion on short-term goal setting, focused primarily on the upcoming charter renewal. There was also thematic discussion regarding long-term planning, expected to be the focus immediately following the charter renewal. Ms. Bilal-Page reviewed the many advantages of community partnerships, and requested Board member support in the development of those partnerships. Board members recapped priorities in the Strategic Plan leading up to the charter renewal, and their plans to hold a long-term Strategic Planning retreat following that renewal to discuss additional goals.

**V. Public Hearing on the 2021-2022 Proposed Annual Budget**

Mr. Julal announced the commencement of the budget public hearing on the proposed 2021-2022 Annual Budget. He noted the public hearing had been published as required by Georgia Law. He asked if there were any members of the public wishing to address the proposed 2021-2022 school year budget. Hearing none, Mr. Julal asked Mr. Corkran to review the proposed budget with the Board. Mr. Corkran referred the Board to the proposed Budget materials provided in the Board meeting materials. He reviewed the budget development process to date that included the Board Treasurer, School Leader, and Pearson Virtual Schools support staff. He further advised that the final Budget will be presented to the Board for their consideration at their next Board meeting. There being no questions and no members of the public in attendance, the Board closed the public hearing and resumed the regular session of the meeting.

**VI. Public Comment**

There were no public comments at this time.

**VII. Audit Committee, Committee of the Entire Board**

a. Approval of Audit Firm Engagement for the 2020-2021 School Year Annual Financial Audit

Mr. Julal and Mr. Corkran reviewed highlights of the audit firm engagement letter, as included in the Board meeting materials. Mr. Julal reviewed the process completed to identify the proposed audit firm, as well as the anticipated audit-related charges and scope of services. There being no further discussion, Ms. Collins made the following motion and it was seconded by Mr. Mustakeem as follows:

RESOLVED, that the engagement of Nichols, Cauley & Associates, LLC for the 2020-2021 school year financial audit, as presented, is hereby accepted.

The motion passed unanimously.

**VIII. Routine Business**

a. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Julal asked the Board to review the Agenda distributed prior to the meeting. There being no further changes noted, a motion was made by Mr. Thompson and seconded by Mr. Grant as follows:

RESOLVED, that the Agenda for the May 20, 2021 Meeting and Strategic Planning of the Board of Directors of the Georgia Connections Academy, as presented, is hereby approved.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **IX. Oral Reports**

### a. School Leader's Report

#### i. Data Dashboard

Ms. Bilal-Page noted the extensive discussion held earlier in the meeting on school data, and referred the Board to the data dashboard information as included in the Board meeting materials.

#### ii. Graduation Plans and End of Year Activities

Ms. Bilal-Page reminded the Board that the high school graduation ceremony is planned for June 2, 2021 and encouraged Board members to attend.

#### iii. State Testing Update

Ms. Bilal-Page reviewed the most recent updates to the state testing process for the school year, as well as guidance received from the state.

### b. Financial Report

Mr. Corkran reviewed the financial materials included in the Board meeting materials in detail, highlighting the budget and forecasting areas of the financial statements. He reviewed the changes in the financials and forecasted expenses since the last meeting's statements, including the balance sheet and school's revenue and expense statements.

### c. Pearson Products, Services and Initiatives Update

Ms. Duquette reviewed details within the 2021-2022 Products, Services and Initiatives memo, as included in the Board meeting materials. She reviewed the upcoming programmatic focus on curriculum, learner experience, and technology, as well as specific initiatives that are high on Pearson's priority list for deployment to the school both within the next school year, and beyond. Ms. Duquette further detailed curriculum changes and alignment initiatives, including a focus on diversity and inclusion in course content. Board members expressed satisfaction with Pearson's ongoing dedication to the school's success, and thanked Ms. Duquette for the detailed update.

## **X. Consent Items**

Mr. Julal asked the Board members whether there were any items from the Consent Items that they wished to have moved to Action Items for discussion, or tabled. There being no changes noted, a motion was made by Mr. Grant and seconded by Ms. Collins as follows:

RESOLVED, the Consent Items:

- a. Approval of Minutes from the March 18, 2021 Board Meeting;
- b. Approval of OBL Invoices for April (# 91000007819);
- c. Approval of Revision(s) to Employee Handbook: Incentive Compensation Language;
- d. Approval of Revision(s) to the 2021-2022 School Year State Specific School Handbook: Multiple Updates;
- e. Approval of Board President as Board Designee to Approve Summer Staffing Decisions for the 2021- 2022 School Year; and
- f. Ratification of 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment to Lease; are hereby approved.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **XI. Action Items**

### a. Review and Approval of Staffing Report

Ms. Bilal-Page provided the Board with an update on staffing levels and hiring efforts for the next school year. She further reviewed specific staffing needs for the school, and recently hired staff members and the positions each filled. Board members discussed the hiring climate for the school, and the current interest in teaching positions. There being no further discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Grant and seconded by Mr. Julal as follows:

RESOLVED, that the Staffing Report, as presented, is hereby approved.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **XII. Information Items**

### a. Results of the Parent Satisfaction Survey

Ms. Bilal-Page reviewed the results of the annual Parent Satisfaction Survey, as included in the Board meeting materials.

### b. State Account Relations (STAR) Update

Ms. Duquette reviewed legislative activities in the state, which may impact the school. She further discussed Pearson ongoing support, as well as further opportunities for the school following charter renewal, and the potential addition of grade levels.

c. School Leadership Team (PSLT) Update

In Ms. Brown's absence, Ms. Arthur referred Board members to the metrics data included in the Board meeting materials, and recommended any questions be directed to Ms. Bilal-Page.

i. School Operations Metrics

This item required no additional discussion at this time.

ii. Planning for School Leader Performance Review

Mr. Grant outlined the annual school leader review process with the Board, including the LKES requirements as well as the PSLT review in Ultipro. Ms. Arthur reminded Board members that the process includes feedback from the Board through a survey, and Mr. Grant further reminded the Board that Ms. Bilal-Page's final review will take place during the Board's Annual Meeting in June.

d. Board Relations Updates

i. SCSC Required Training Update

Ms. Arthur reminded Board members of the two-part online training requirements for the school year, and the due date of completion, June 30<sup>th</sup>. Board members discussed their progress toward certificate completion, as well as options for completing the necessary annual SCSC training requirements in future school years.

ii. Nondiscrimination Statement for Handbooks

Ms. Arthur provided an update on the nondiscrimination statement, as included in the Board meeting materials. She advised that the statement had been included within the school handbook as part of annual measures to ensure compliance with all state and federal mandates related to nondiscrimination.

iii. Board Planning for the 2021-2022 School Year

- Board Composition

Ms. Arthur discussed with the Board the current composition, including board member terms that would be up at this year's Annual Meeting, and encouraged Board members to discuss their intentions regarding terms and renewal with the Board Chair.

- Proposed Meetings Schedule

The Board confirmed their support of maintaining the current meeting schedule for the upcoming school year. Ms. Arthur advised that the consideration of the Board meeting schedule for the 2021-2022 school year will be included on the June Annual Meeting agenda.

**XIII. Adjournment and Confirmation of Annual Meeting Date – Thursday June 17, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. via teleconference**

Mr. Julal noted that the Board was at the end of its agenda. There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m. The Board's annual meeting is to be held on Thursday, June 17, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.